

Smith, Edward

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Art. 575 - C




# Artists of Abraham Lincoln portraits

Edward Gentile

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



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<http://archive.org/details/artistsofabrahglinec>

Oak Park Ill.

July - 12<sup>th</sup>/<sub>44</sub>

Lincoln National Life Foundation

Fort Wayne, Indiana

Mr. Louis A. Warren - Director

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you through the recommendation of Mr. L.W. Paine of the Economy Book Store, whom I visited a few weeks ago to buy a bible and while there I met Mr. Paine whom I have known for a number of years, he inquired as to what I have been doing in the past years, so I told him about the new type of Art work I have been doing in the lost Art of Illumination and that I am trying to revive it in a modern style, although these paintings take three to six months to complete one, so far they are creating a lot of interest in fact more than I expected. Then I mentioned my Abraham Lincoln gettysburg address painting, which has been very highly commented on by well known, Collectors of Lincoln, movie actors - well known authors - newspapers - and the public in general, also having been exhibited in many of the large Department store display windows, and during Abe. Lincoln over.



birthday, it was exhibited at the WGN-Radio station for a month, also commented over the WGN mutual Broadcast, was questioned as to the meritorious work I have been doing in the fine arts, then mentioned on going to New York this year on account of the demand for prints that so many people have written me for, and asking me why I didn't have it published, the truth of it is I just made this painting of "Lincoln" and thirty others just as a hobby, "art for arts sake" - but upon so many inquiries for prints I decided on going to N.Y. to see if I can locate a publisher to publish them for me - though the original is not for sale.

So Mr. L.W. Paine suggested in my writing to you, in that you were very interested in Lincoln subjects, and he thought you might be interested in the publishing of this painting of "Abe Lincoln - Gettysberg address" Now if you should happen to be in Chicago sometime I will be pleased to show it to you, as it really must be seen to be appreciated. if you will let me know the time and date, or you may come to my studio if you so desire. if not I will meet you downtown -

At present four of my patriotic paintings, Geo. Washington, - Abe Lincoln, - Concord Hymn - by Ralph Wald Emerson, - and the Star Spangled Banner - are being reproduced by the Louis Allis Company of Milwaukee, in full colors - for the Louis Allis Messenger - a magazine they get out every 2 months two of them will be in the July and August issue

Very sincerely yours

Edward Gentile  
109 No. Oak Park Ave -  
Oak Park - Illinois.

Gentile

Art work. Publication

July 20, 1944

Mr. Edward Gentile  
109 N. Oak Park Ave.  
Oak Park, Ill.

My dear Mr. Gentile:

Thank you very much for your information about the Lincoln art work but I regret sincerely we are in no position here to publish the item you suggest, in fact, we are doing no publishing whatever during the War. So I think it is quite likely you will have to look to the New York contacts.

We would like very much to have for our Foundation collection, however, any Lincoln material you may have done in reproduction, especially the Abe Lincoln put out by the Louis Allis Company.

I do not anticipate being in Chicago in the near future but will keep your address in case I do have an opportunity to see your work.

Very truly yours,

LAW:vff

Director





Oak Park Ill.

March 27-45

Mr. Louis A. Warren Dir.,  
Lincoln Natl. Life Foundation

Dear Mr. Warren

Some time ago

I wrote to you about my "Lincoln painting" and in your negative reply per publication of my painting, you referred in your letter that if it were ever published you would like to have a copy of it.

"The Louis Allis Co." of Milwaukee Wis., have published it in their messenger Magazine which they get out every month they printed it in four colors though it would take about 12 plates to really get a fine job, and using gold but as it is, I think it came out rather nice and hope you like it, later on I believe I have a publisher who will publish it the right way, when material can be had, after this War - so if when I do, I'll be glad to send you a good copy, and if you are ever in Chicago I shall be pleased to show you the original painting of -



"Lincoln" at present I am working on another a quotation on "Women" which I hope to have finished in two months - in the meantime -

If you should have any booklets circulars Etc that are illustrated pertaining to Lincoln, weather old or new, which you send out occasionally I will appreciate it very much as I am planning on making a series of about 20 more of him, so I am gathering all the material I can for my future paintings of "Abe Lincoln".

Inclosed find copy of messenger with Lincoln painting.

Sincerely yours

Edward gentile

109 No. Oak Park Ave.

Oak Park, Illinois

P.S. I am the Party that Mr. Payne of the Economy Book Store, who refered me to you -





May 2, 1945

Mr. Edward Gentile  
109 N. Oak Park Avenue  
Oak Park, Illinois

My dear Mr. Gentile:

I am very happy indeed to receive the magazine "The Louis Allis Messenger" which carries such a very fine reproduction of your painting.

We would be most happy to hear from you if you are successful in securing a publisher for the print and will look forward to receiving a copy.

Please find under separate cover a little packet of Lincoln material which we have got together and which you will please receive with our compliments.

Very truly yours,

LAW:WM

Director

THE  
LIBRARY OF THE  
MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY  
AND  
ZOOLOGY  
OF THE  
CITY OF LONDON  
IN THE  
MUSEUM BUILDINGS  
LONDON  
W.C.2



# All-But-Lost Art Revived

New Disciple of Illuminating Took Six Months to Complete Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

By Ralph W. Cessna

**H**AD it not been for the depression of 1929 you and I today might not have the privilege of looking upon the exquisite illuminating work of Edward Gentile. For it took the deprivations and the discouragements of the economic slump to send this gifted son of Italian immigrants out searching for two things—a new source of livelihood, and an escape from the gloomy realism of the art which arose out of the period. In his own ingenious adaptation of the all-but-lost art of illuminating he found both.

This one-time railroad call boy and telegraph operator has, however, given something to the world as well. He has revived, and proved that in this age of surrealism there is a place and appreciation for, an ancient mode of expressing beauty.

Illuminating must not be confused with engrossing, which many insist is an art in itself. The engrosser copies legal documents, diplomas, awards and such things in a "fair, large hand." (Thus *en gros*!) He embellishes his work with sweeping flourishes, usually working with ink, in one color, using a special engrosser's pen. And while the engrosser is credited with keeping alive the profession of free-hand writing and printing as a sort of commercial adaptation of the ancient

served examples of the art have the theological background. Of the 32 pieces which Mr. Gentile has completed, 19 have religious subjects, a field especially well adapted for the graceful beauty of illumination where illustration at all is suitable.

Before the depression Mr. Gentile was a commercial artist. The slump little by little removed this means of livelihood and the family had a pretty difficult time of it for a while. An antique shop and a job as supervisor of a WPA art project helped things along. It was here that Mr. Gentile revealed that he had the heart of a true artist. Seeing no market for such a thing, but repelled by the ugliness of the art inspired by the disturbed condition of the times, he turned to illumination. He had not studied it, in fact had never studied color, and color is most important in illumination. But Mr. Gentile went ahead, keeping out enough money to buy materials and paints, and gold leaf, which is an expensive item.

He chose as his subjects Biblical, patriotic, and inspirational themes. Painstakingly printing out the texts, he wove around them intricate designs profuse with scrolls, symbolical figures, appropriate landscapes, arabesques, and exotic birds and flowers.

Besides the gold leaf he used six colors, delicate pastel shades of emerald green, red, and blue. It is notable that in spite of his lack of special color training he is able to take such an ordinarily vivid color as the red in the American flag and produce a whole, containing pastel greens and blues, without a jarring color note. Asked how he does it, he says he doesn't know; technically, he "just does it."

Except for an occasional circle or square, Mr. Gentile uses no drafting instruments, the letters being done with a pen, and the embellishment by a special brush.

Whereas the old-time illuminator, working often with a whole book before him, completed each letter with a single stroke, Mr. Gentile often works at each letter as if it were a separate portrait. Where it took the ancient scribe hours to do a page, it takes Mr. Gentile many days to complete just a line or two of textual matter. It required four months to do the Concord Hymn, he says, and six months to complete Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

"What appeared as a misfortune," says Mr. Gentile, referring to the depression, "has proved a blessing in disguise. In this

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1870-1871

1871-1872

1872-1873

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1875-1876

1876-1877

1877-1878





Edward G. Robinson, famous motion picture star, on his recent visit to Chicago to aid the sale of *Edward G. Robinson*, was greeted by Edward Gentile (left), 109 North Oak Park avenue. Mr. Robinson, who owns a collection of artistic masterpieces, was particularly interested in Mr. Gentile's portrait of Lincoln. Mr. Gentile required nine months to complete the portrait, which is framed by scenes from the life of Lincoln and the Gettysburg address.

## Turns Down \$35,000 For Two of His Works

By Paul T. Gilbert.

AFTER having lost his home, his business and his life in savings in the depression, and after having worked at wages of \$80 a month as a director of a WPA art project, Edward Gentile of 109 Oak Park ave., Oak Park, re-

cently refused an offer of \$35,000 for two of his paintings and the copyrights thereof.

And there are few, even among the top-flight American artists, who can command a price like that.

Up to five years ago Gentile had never studied color. He became interested, however, in the all-but-lost medium of illumination—the decoration of old manuscripts—when he came to Chicago to work on the Lincoln project. He was assigned to decorate the Lincoln Bible, and with this encouragement he completed others. He now has a collection of more than 30, and with a few exceptions, they are painted in order, by the reverse to tell any of them. He is saving them, he says, for exhibitions.

Gentile's workshop was so barren as any monastery cell. It consisted of a back room of a dingy store building, where he and his wife made their home. From there, recently, he purchased masterpieces—gold leaf was the most expensive—for the revival of this art.

SEVERAL of his patriotic paintings, however, were loaned to the War Relocation Authority and the Treasury Department for the promotion of war bond sales.

Gentile's talents as a draftsman were utilized by the armed services in World War I, when he was assigned to prepare panoramic maps from an observation balloon.

Returning to civilian life, he became a commercial artist, only to lose his accounts with the New York stock market crash. "But what appeared as a misfortune at the time has proved a blessing in disguise," he says. "In this revival of an ancient art I feel that I have found myself."

## All-But-Lost Art Revived

New Disciple of Illuminating Took Six Months to Complete Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

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HAS it not been for the depression of 1929 you and I today might not be reading the thrilling and colorful life of the exquisite illuminating work of Edward Gentile. For it took the deprivation and the discouragement of the economic slump to send this gifted son of Italian immigrants out searching for a new source of livelihood, and an escape from the gloomy reality of the art which he had found in the period of its own ingenious adaptation of the all-but-lost art of illuminating he found here.

This one-time railroad call boy and telegraph operator has, however, given something to the world as well. He has revived, and proved that in this age of surrealism there is a place and appreciation for, an ancient mode of expressing beauty. Illuminating must not be confused with engraving, which many insist is an art in itself. The engraver copies legal documents, diplomas, awards and such things in a "fair, large hand." (Thus engravings he embellishes his work with sweeping flourishes, usually working with ink, in one color, using a special engraver's pen. And while the engraver is credited with keeping alive the profession of fine-hand writing and printing as a sort of commercial adaptation of the ancient illuminator's art, it is not illuminating.

Illumination, according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, is "the embellishment of written or printed text or design with colors or gold." In ancient times the printer of the text and the decorator or illuminator were often one person. But sometimes as many as five or six worked on one manuscript, one doing the lettering, another the elaborately decorated capitals, another the scrolls, another the miniature and ornamental accessories, and so on.

From the first known examples of illumination in the fourth century, until a hundred years or so after the discovery of printing, the art developed, refinement, but also a narrow standardization. And here is a narrow standardization.

Instead of simply doing what the old illuminators did, instead of trying to apply their traditional themes and figures to the text, Mr. Gentile uses the creative modern designs to fit the need. The theme and the figure is carried into the scene and figure, even into the scrollwork. Whereas the old illuminators came to a standard of design, the modern figures, Mr. Gentile uses what the text calls for. The result is that when examined carefully his work is seen to resemble that of the ancient illuminators in the quiet formality and exuberance of the embellishment.

Illumination is associated in the popular mind with religious subjects, probably because before the discovery of printing about the only literature was the Bible and theological manuscripts, and these were printed and illuminated by hand, largely by monks. Ancient illumination appeared in connection with other religious subjects, but much of the pre-

served examples of the art were the theological background. Of the 32 pieces which Mr. Gentile has completed, 19 have religious subjects, a field especially well adapted for the graceful beauty of illumination where illustration at all is suitable.

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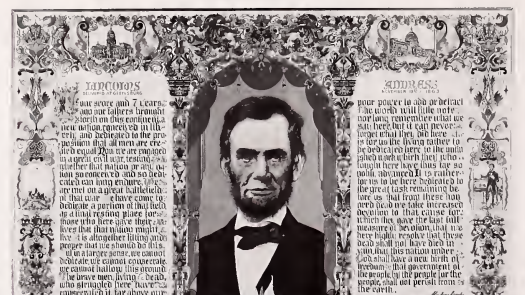
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Meanwhile his work has not been gathering dust on the shelves at home. He has refused no request to exhibit for twenty years, frequently in connection with War recruiting campaigns and War Bond sales. Once a work based on the Joyce Kilmer poem "Trees" was exhibited in connection with the film "The Fighting 6888," in which the poet was depicted as one of the chief characters. It seemed here for some time in the lobby of a Chicago theater, and the management was flooded with requests for reprints, which were not then available.

Among his illuminations of religious subjects is "The Daily Prayer," by Mary Baker Eddy, Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science.

It was a kind word of encouragement from the late Robert B. Harshe, director of the Art Institute, upon seeing his illumination of "The 131st Psalm," which Mr. Gentile says gave him the inspiration to continue in what he saw as a pioneer's path, utility for some time at least to bring much material ready.

It seems, though, that his day is about to come.



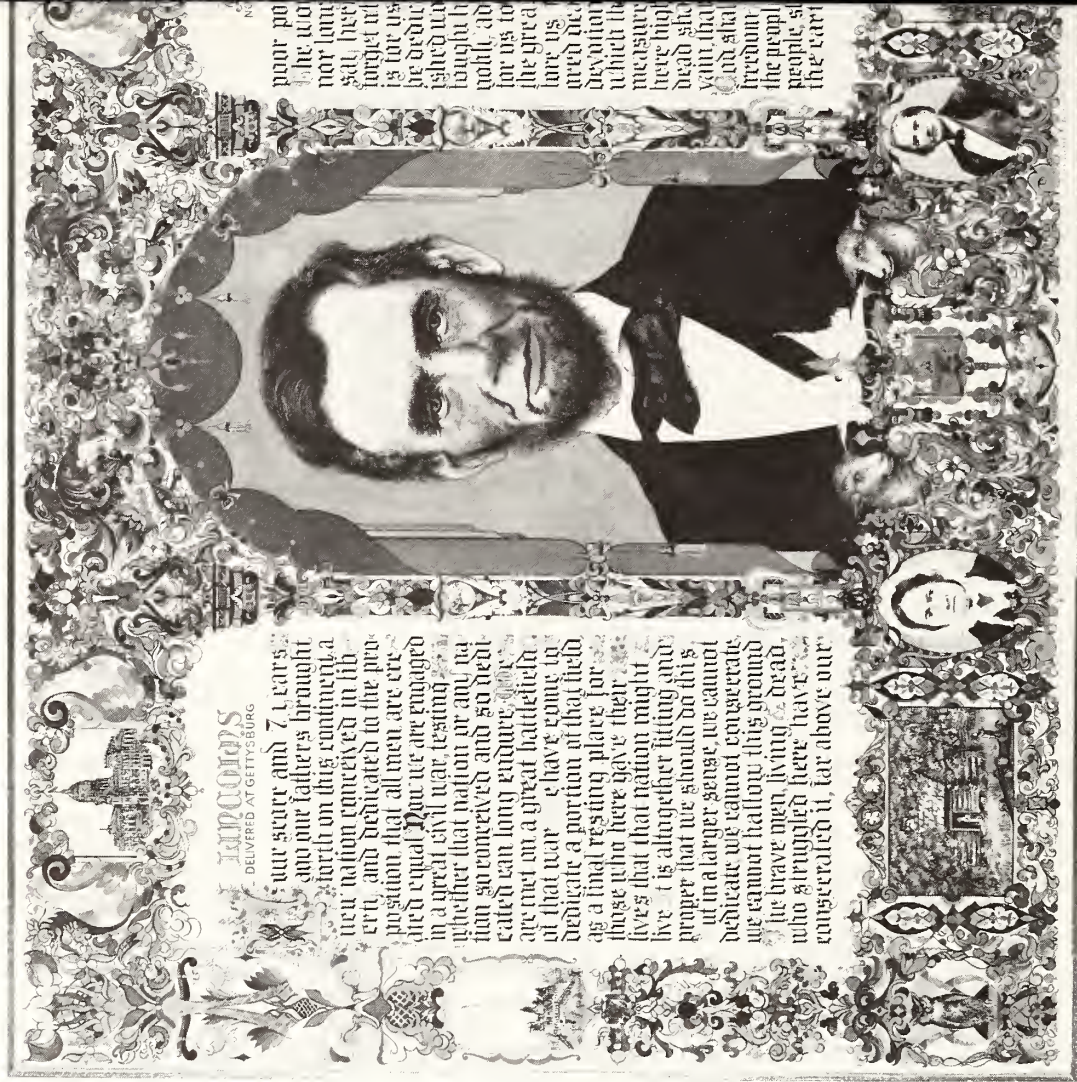


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Ruth:

I guess could better  
order one of these and  
put the info endorsed  
in the clipping file  
m

April 30, 1986

Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln's Library and Museum  
Ft. Wayne, IN

Dear Mr. Warren:

Prints are now available for sale of Edward Gentile's illuminated manuscript of Lincoln's Gettysburg address.

They are \$20.00 per print and the stock is natural white kidskin 80#. Quantity prices available upon request.

If you would like further information regarding these manuscripts, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

*Darlene Bakk*

Darlene Bakk  
Fine Arts Print Guild  
39W795 Reindeer Trail  
St. Charles, IL 60174

312-377-7156

Reverse side, "© Amadeus T. Gentile Dec. 1981

Purchased & cataloged 5-12-86  
File in large print drawer





# Fine Arts Print Guild

39W795 Reindeer Trail

~~X209 EAST WILSON ROAD~~

~~DOXBAMX XX 60148~~

St. Charles, IL 60174

Date May 7, 1986

Gentlemen:

Please ship the following copies of reproductions of the Illuminated Manuscripts as indicated below. Quantity prices available upon request.

1 Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address"

         Washington's "Inauguration Prayer"

         F. Scott Key's "Star Spangled Banner"

         R. Waldo Emerson's "Concord Hymn"

1 Total @ \$ 20.00 each, handling & postage included.

Enclosed is my check for \$ 20.00 .

Name Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library/Museum

Street 1300 S. Clinton Street

City Fort Wayne State IN Zip 46801



(3 24-116 Edward

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Art Shire

